

Approved:

Benjamin W. Schrier
BENJAMIN WOODSIDE SCHRIER
Assistant United States Attorney

Before: THE HONORABLE SARAH NETBURN
United States Magistrate Judge
Southern District of New York

19MAG . 3608

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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

- v. -

JOHN LAMBERT,
a/k/a "Eric Pope,"

Defendant.

: SEALED COMPLAINT

:
: Violations of
: 18 U.S.C. §§ 1349, 1343,
: and 2

:
: COUNTY OF OFFENSE:
: NEW YORK

- - - - - X

SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK, ss.:

KEVIN LECLAIR, being duly sworn, deposes and says that he is a Special Agent with the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, and charges as follows:

COUNT ONE

(Conspiracy to Commit Wire Fraud)

1. From at least in or about August 2016, up to and including at least in or about April 2018, in the Southern District of New York and elsewhere, JOHN LAMBERT, a/k/a "Eric Pope," the defendant, and others known and unknown, willfully and knowingly did combine, conspire, confederate, and agree together and with each other to commit wire fraud, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1343.

2. It was a part and object of the conspiracy that JOHN LAMBERT, a/k/a "Eric Pope," the defendant, and others known and unknown, willfully and knowingly, having devised and intending to devise a scheme and artifice to defraud and for obtaining money and property by means of false and fraudulent pretenses, representations, and promises, would and did transmit and cause to be transmitted by means of wire, radio, and television communication in interstate and foreign commerce, writings,

signs, signals, pictures, and sounds for the purpose of executing such scheme and artifice, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1343.

(Title 18, United States Code, Section 1349.)

COUNT TWO

(Wire Fraud)

3. From at least in or about August 2016 up to and including at least in or about April 2018, in the Southern District of New York and elsewhere, JOHN LAMBERT, a/k/a "Eric Pope," the defendant, willfully and knowingly, having devised and intending to devise a scheme and artifice to defraud, and for obtaining money and property by means of false and fraudulent pretenses, representations, and promises, and attempting to do so, did transmit and cause to be transmitted by means of wire, radio, and television communication in interstate and foreign commerce, writings, signs, signals, pictures, and sounds, for the purpose of executing such scheme and artifice, to wit, LAMBERT, using email, phone calls, and other means, made false representations about his own qualifications and those of his companies, by, among other things, falsely claiming to be an attorney named "Eric Pope," and by doing so fraudulently induced various individuals and entities to pay him for purported legal advice and services through PayPal.

(Title 18, United States Code, Sections 1343 and 2.)

The bases for my knowledge and for the foregoing charges are, in part, as follows:

4. I am a Special Agent with the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York. I have been a Special Agent with the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York since approximately June 2018. Before that, I was a Special Agent with the United States Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration for approximately two years, and a Special Agent with the United States Department of State Diplomatic Security Service for approximately four-and-a-half years. I have been personally involved in the investigation of this matter.

5. This affidavit is based upon the experience described in the preceding paragraph, as well as my conversations with other law enforcement officers and witnesses, and my examination

of reports, records, and other materials. Because this affidavit is being submitted for the limited purpose of establishing probable cause, it does not include all the facts that I have learned during the course of my investigation. Where the contents of documents and the actions, statements, and conversations of others are reported herein, they are reported in substance and in part, except where otherwise indicated.

OVERVIEW OF THE SCHEME TO DEFRAUD
CONSUMERS OF LEGAL ADVICE AND SERVICES

6. As set forth below, this investigation has revealed that JOHN LAMBERT, a/k/a "Eric Pope," the defendant, and at least one co-conspirator ("CS-1"),¹ perpetrated a scheme to defraud consumers of legal advice and services, by falsely representing, through web-based platforms for freelancing services, websites, emails, phone calls, and other means, that they were experienced attorneys who had attended elite law schools, when in fact they were not attorneys and had never attended law school. Having misled their victims into believing they were highly qualified attorneys, LAMBERT and his co-conspirator then attempted to and in some cases did provide legal advice and services to their victims, in exchange for which their victims paid money.

7. Specifically, based on several interviews that other law-enforcement officers and I have conducted of CS-1, as well as documents and information that CS-1 has provided to the Government, I have learned the following:

- a. In or about August 2016, JOHN LAMBERT, a/k/a "Eric Pope," the defendant, and CS-1 discussed creating a legal consulting company called "Headline Consulting" that would use a web-based platform for freelancing services ("Freelance Platform-1") to attract clients.
- b. In or about August 2016, LAMBERT created an alias for himself on Freelance Platform-1, and a corresponding profile, in the name of "Eric Pope." LAMBERT also

¹ CS-1 has been providing information to the Government since in or about April 2018 in the hope of not being charged for his role in the wire-fraud conspiracy charged in Count One of this Complaint. Information that CS-1 has provided to the Government has proven reliable, and has been corroborated by other means, including documentary evidence, interviews of victims, and publicly available information on the Internet and in databases.

helped CS-1 create an alias and a corresponding profile in the name of "Gregory Shapiro."

- c. "Eric Pope" and "Gregory Shapiro" were originally described on Freelance Platform-1 as legal consultants affiliated with Headline Consulting, but LAMBERT later changed that description to attorneys. LAMBERT's profile for "Eric Pope" on Freelance Platform-1 stated that he was an attorney located in New York City, when in fact he was not and had never been an attorney, and was living in North Carolina.
- d. LAMBERT told CS-1 that, if asked, CS-1 should deny that he and LAMBERT were associated with the profiles for "Eric Pope" and "Gregory Shapiro" on Freelance Platform-1.
- e. In or about October 2016, CS-1 and LAMBERT started seeking and obtaining freelance jobs for legal and non-legal services through Freelance Platform-1. For instance, LAMBERT and CS-1 sought and obtained two freelance web-design jobs, for which the client paid Headline Consulting through PayPal. LAMBERT later paid CS-1 for his work on the web-design jobs through PayPal.
- f. In or about October 2016, LAMBERT decided to create a website for Headline Consulting. LAMBERT and CS-1 purchased a domain name and created content for the website. LAMBERT created a profile for "Eric Pope" on the website, and helped CS-1 create a profile for "Gregory Shapiro." Lambert also created fictitious profiles for other individuals on the website, including a purported Headline Consulting secretary, using photographs he found on the Internet of people neither he nor CS-1 knew. The website that LAMBERT and CS-1 created for Headline Consulting was linked to the profiles for "Eric Pope" and "Gregory Shapiro" on Freelance Platform-1.
- g. The phone number listed on the website for Headline Consulting had a 917 area code ("917 Number-1").

8. Based on my training and experience, I know that 917 is an area code that serves New York City.

9. Based on my review of information available on law enforcement and publicly accessible databases, as well as phone records for 917 Number-1, I have learned that JOHN LAMBERT, a/k/a "Eric Pope," the defendant, did not obtain 917 Number-1 through a traditional telecommunications service provider. Rather, he registered for an account with a company that enables the use of multiple phone numbers on a single device ("Spoofing Company-1"). In particular, LAMBERT arranged for 917 Number-1 to be used on his cellphone, which was assigned a call number with a 919 area code (the "919 Number").

10. Based on my training and experience, I know that 919 is an area code that serves the east-central part of North Carolina.

11. Based on my training and experience, my review of publicly accessible information about Spoofing Company-1 and the types of services it provides, I believe that Spoofing Company-1 would re-route to the 919 Number any calls to 917 Number-1. Similarly, I understand that JOHN LAMBERT, a/k/a "Eric Pope," the defendant, would have been able to make calls from the 919 Number that transmitted 917 Number-1 as caller identification information to the receiving phone, making it appear as though the call originated from 917 Number-1. This practice is known as caller identification "spoofing." In this sense, calls to and from 917 Number-1 were effectively calls to and from the 919 Number.

12. Based on the interviews of CS-1 and the documents and information that CS-1 provided, I have learned the following:

- a. JOHN LAMBERT, a/k/a "Eric Pope," the defendant, told CS-1 that it was important for it to appear as though Headline Consulting had a number with an area code that serves New York City, because the Headline Consulting website stated that the company was located there.
- b. In or about early 2017, using the alias "Gregory Shapiro," CS-1 sought and obtained legal jobs from at least two clients through Freelance Platform-1. At or around the same time, CS-1 unsuccessfully solicited other legal jobs through Freelance Platform-1 approximately 10 times.

13. Based on my discussions with victims of the fraudulent scheme charged in this Complaint, which are described in greater

detail below, I have learned that, at some point in or before September 2017, JOHN LAMBERT, a/k/a "Eric Pope," the defendant, created another website associated with his alias. This website purported to be for a law firm called "Pope and Dunn."

14. Based on my review of a publicly accessible digital archive of the Internet (the "Internet Archive"), which captured images from the Pope and Dunn website as it appeared on September 28, 2017, I have learned that the following representations appeared on the website on or about that date, all of which were false, as discussed in greater detail below:

- a. Pope and Dunn had thousands of trusted clients, had protected hundreds of millions of dollars for its clients, had a high success rate in its cases, and had handled thousands of corporate cases.
- b. "Eric Pope," one of Pope and Dunn's six attorneys, was a graduate of an elite law school ("Law School-1"); a graduate of an elite undergraduate institution ("University-1"); and had 15 years of work experience in corporate and patent law.
- c. "Gregory Shapiro," another one of Pope and Dunn's six lawyers, was a graduate of an elite law school ("Law School-2"), and was widely recognized as one of the foremost leaders in the field of intellectual property.
- d. Pope and Dunn was located in Manhattan, at an address on Water Street (the "Manhattan Address"). Its phone number had a 646 area code (the "646 Number").

15. Based on my review of information provided by Law School-1, I have learned that no individual named "John Lambert" or "Eric Pope" ever attended or graduated from Law School-1.

16. Based on the interviews of CS-1 and the documents and information CS-1 provided, I have learned the following:

- a. JOHN LAMBERT, a/k/a "Eric Pope," the defendant, never attended nor graduated from University-1.
- b. CS-1 neither attended nor graduated from Law School-2.

17. Based on the interviews of CS-1 and the documents and information CS-1 provided, phone records, and GPS historical

location information for the 919 Number, I have learned that JOHN LAMBERT, a/k/a "Eric Pope," the defendant, was operating the Pope and Dunn website from North Carolina and elsewhere, but not from Manhattan, New York.

18. Based on my training and experience, I know that 646 is an area code that serves Manhattan, New York.

19. Based on my review of information available on law enforcement and publicly accessible databases, as well as phone records, I have learned the following:

- a. JOHN LAMBERT, a/k/a "Eric Pope," the defendant, did not obtain the 646 Number through a traditional telecommunications service provider. Rather, he obtained the 646 Number through a second spoofing company ("Spoofing Company-2").
- b. The 646 Number is associated with two other numbers, one of which is a second 917 number ("917 Number-2").
- c. 917 Number-2 is maintained by a third spoofing company ("Spoofing Company-3"), and is associated with LAMBERT and the 919 Number.

Credit Victim-1 and Credit Victim-2

20. Based on my review of documents and information provided to the Government by an individual ("Credit Victim-1") who posted a legal job on Freelance Platform-1 seeking an attorney to assist with correcting errors in a credit report prepared by a major credit reporting agency ("Credit Reporting Agency-1"), I have learned the following:

- a. Credit Victim-1 posted the legal job in question on Freelance Platform-1 in or about the summer of 2017. In the posting, Credit Victim-1 stated that Credit Victim-1 was "having issues with [Credit Reporting Agency-1] and their handling of my credit report," and "was potentially looking for help with this."
- b. At some point after Credit Victim-1 posted the legal job, JOHN LAMBERT, a/k/a "Eric Pope," the defendant, responded, using his alias. LAMBERT stated that he was a graduate of Law School-1; he had gained experience in corporate, finance, and property law, making him an expert in those fields; he had worked

with hundreds of clients, including "tech moguls" and "entrepreneurs," in the United States and Europe; and before starting his own law firm, he had worked at Law Firm-1.

- c. LAMBERT used the alias "Eric Pope" in all of his communications with Credit Victim-1.
- d. On or about July 18, 2017, LAMBERT sent Credit Victim-1 an "Agreement for Legal Service," describing the tasks for which "Eric Pope" had been retained as "Correction of all Main Credit Files" and "Permanent Resolution of Matter." The agreement was on Headline Consulting letterhead, and listed the Manhattan Address and 646 Number as contact information for the "Law Offices of Pope and Dunn," "Attorneys at Law."
- e. In a section titled "Rights as Client," the agreement stated, "I have the right to know the qualifications of the staff assisting me."
- f. From at least in or about July 2017 through at least in or about April 2018, LAMBERT represented to Credit Victim-1 in numerous emails that he was in contact with Credit Reporting Agency-1, and that he was making efforts to resolve the issues with Credit Victim-1's credit report, potentially file a lawsuit against Credit Reporting Agency-1, and secure an out-of-court settlement with Credit Reporting Agency-1.
- g. At some point after in or about July 2017, Credit Victim-1 introduced LAMBERT to Credit Victim-1's partner ("Credit Victim-2"), who was also seeking assistance with issues related to Credit Victim-2's credit. LAMBERT, using the alias "Eric Pope," thereafter purported to provide legal advice and services to Credit Victim-2 as well.
- h. On or about August 29, 2017, Credit Victim-1 sent an email to LAMBERT, writing, "I can't buy a home due to all of this, my credit cards have been closed due this, and [Credit Reporting Agency-1 is] sending out false information to anyone who should inquire into me in any legitimate manner. I really cant [sic] think of anything else [Credit Reporting Agency-1] could do to harm me financially, employment wise, and reputation wise."

- i. On or about November 3, 2017, Credit Victim-1 sent an email to an account associated with an individual LAMBERT had described in another email as his "assistant," writing, "I have ample money in my 401k to cash out to pay this off at anytime that it needs to be paid in full. I would prefer not to have to cash out any part of my 401k to pay this balance, but if me doing so causes any delay whatsoever then I certainly will immediately remit the balance."
- j. At some point after sending the email described in the previous paragraph, Credit Victim-1 did, in fact, withdraw money from Credit Victim-1's 401(k) account to pay LAMBERT for the purported legal advice and services he provided.
- k. On or about July 7, 2018, Credit Victim-1 sent an email to LAMBERT, writing, "I wanted to know if you had heard anything at all form [sic] [Credit Reporting Agency-1] at this point? Should be going ahead and filing suit at this point since they are taking no action at all? I applied for a much better job recently and I was declined the job because the potential employer was not able to pull my credit. This was a dream job for me and would have been 50k more per year for me that I was denied due to them not being able to pull my credit."
- l. After sending the email described in the preceding paragraph, Credit Victim-1 attempted to contact LAMBERT numerous times, but was unsuccessful.

21. Based on my review of the documents and information provided by Credit Victim-1 and records from PayPal, I have learned that, from at least in or about July 2017 through at least in or about April 2018, Credit Victim-1 paid JOHN LAMBERT, a/k/a "Eric Pope," the defendant, over \$10,000 through PayPal for the purported legal advice and services that he had provided to Credit Victim-1 and Credit Victim-2. I have also learned that, on or about December 15, 2017, Credit Victim-2 paid LAMBERT approximately \$500 for purported legal advice and services. The PayPal account to which Credit Victim-1 and Credit Victim-2 made those payments was in the name of Headline Consulting.

Will Victim-1

22. Based on my review of documents and information provided to the Government by an individual ("Will Victim-1") who posted a legal job on Freelance Platform-1 seeking an attorney to assist with drafting a will, as well as my interview of Will Victim-1, I have learned the following:

- a. Will Victim-1 posted the legal job in question on Freelance Platform-1 in or about July 2017.
- b. JOHN LAMBERT, a/k/a "Eric Pope," the defendant, using his alias, responded to the posting in or about July 2017.
- c. From at least in or about July 2017 through at least in or about October 2017, LAMBERT purported to provide legal advice and services to Will Victim-1, including by drafting a will for Will Victim-1.
- d. In the course of providing purported legal advice and services to Will Victim-1, LAMBERT communicated with Will Victim-1 through at least one phone call, as well as through emails. In the emails that LAMBERT sent to Will Victim-1, his signature block described "Eric Pope" as an "Attorney at Law, HC, PLLC Legal Principle [sic]" at Headline Consulting, provided a link to the Headline Consulting website, and listed 917 Number-1 as his contact phone number.

23. Based on my review of documents and information provided by Will Victim-1, my interview of Will Victim-1, and records from PayPal, I have learned that Will Victim-1 paid JOHN LAMBERT, a/k/a "Eric Pope," the defendant, approximately \$1,500 for his purported legal advice and services.

IT Consulting Company-1

24. Based on my review of documents and information provided to the Government by a certified public accountant ("CPA-1"), as well as my interview of CPA-1, I have learned the following:

- a. From at least in or about August 2017 through at least in or about September 2017, JOHN LAMBERT, a/k/a "Eric Pope," the defendant, using his alias, exchanged emails with CPA-1 about two legal jobs related to

corporate and intellectual property law that CPA-1 had posted on Freelance Platform-1 on behalf of one of CPA-1's clients, an IT consulting company located in Texas ("IT Consulting Company-1"). In the emails that LAMBERT sent to CPA-1, his signature block described "Eric Pope" as an "Attorney at Law, HC, PLLC Legal Principle [sic]" at Headline Consulting, provided a link to the Headline Consulting website, and listed 917 Number-1 as his contact phone number.

- b. From at least in or about August 2017 through at least in or about September 2017, LAMBERT purported to provide legal advice and services to CPA-1 and IT Consulting Company-1 regarding corporate and intellectual property law.

25. Based on my review of the documents and information provided by CPA-1, my interview of CPA-1, and records from PayPal, I have learned that CPA-1 paid JOHN LAMBERT, a/k/a "Eric Pope," the defendant, approximately \$1,400 through PayPal for his purported legal advice and services. The PayPal account to which CPA-1 made those payments was in the name of Headline Consulting.

Skincare Company-1

26. Based on my review of documents and information provided to the Government by the founder of a skincare company ("Skincare Company-1 Founder"), as well as my interview of Skincare Company-1 Founder, I have learned the following:

- a. On or about September 20, 2017, JOHN LAMBERT, a/k/a "Eric Pope," the defendant, using his alias, responded to a legal job that Skincare Company-1 Founder had posted on Freelance Platform-1.
- b. In his response, LAMBERT made many of the same fraudulent representations that he made to Credit Victim-1, including that he was a graduate of Law School-1; he had gained experience in corporate, finance, and property law, making him an expert in those fields; he had worked with hundreds of clients, including "tech moguls" and "entrepreneurs," in the United States and Europe; and before starting his own law firm, he had worked at Law Firm-1. LAMBERT also provided a link to the Pope and Dunn website, where he

said that Skincare Company-1 Founder would be able to find additional examples of his approach and clients.

- c. On or about September 21, 2017, LAMBERT and Skincare Company-1 Founder spoke on the phone regarding LAMBERT's drafting of a termination letter related to a business arrangement between Skincare Company-1 Founder's company ("Skincare Company-1") and a third party. LAMBERT used 917 Number-2 for the call. During the call, Skincare Company-1 Founder was in Manhattan, New York.
- d. On or about September 22, 2017, LAMBERT sent an agreement for legal services to Skincare Company-1 Founder on Pope and Dunn letterhead. The agreement listed the Manhattan Address and the 646 Number. At some point after LAMBERT sent Skincare Company-1 Founder the agreement, Skincare Company-1 Founder hired LAMBERT to draft the termination letter they had previously discussed. LAMBERT subsequently drafted the termination letter.
- e. On or about September 26, 2017, LAMBERT, Skincare Company-1 Founder, and the third party participated in a conference call to discuss the termination letter. LAMBERT used 917 Number-2 for the call. During the call, Skincare Company-1 Founder was in Manhattan, New York.

27. Based on my review of historical GPS location information for the 919 Number, I have learned that JOHN LAMBERT, a/k/a "Eric Pope," the defendant, was in North Carolina during the September 21, 2017 and September 26, 2017 phone calls discussed above.

28. Based on my review of the documents and information provided by Skincare Company-1 Founder, my interview of Skincare Company-1 Founder, and records from PayPal, I have learned that Skincare Company-1 Founder paid JOHN LAMBERT, a/k/a "Eric Pope," the defendant, approximately \$1,120 for his purported legal advice and services. The PayPal account to which Skincare Company-1 Founder made those payments was in the name of Headline Consulting.

Printing Company-1

29. Based on my review of documents and information provided to the Government by a printing company ("Printing Company-1"), as well as my interview of a Printing Company-1 employee ("Printing Company-1 Employee"), I have learned the following:


- a. In or about late September or early October 2017, Printing Company-1 posted a legal job on Freelance Platform-1 seeking an attorney to handle a dispute with a former Printing Company-1 employee who had been fired. The former employee claimed that he had been fired in violation of federal law, and sought back wages, future wages, non-pecuniary damages, benefits, attorneys' costs and fees, and a positive letter of reference on his behalf.
- b. In or about late September or early October 2017, JOHN LAMBERT, a/k/a "Eric Pope," the defendant, responded to the legal job, using his alias. In subsequent email communications with Printing Company-1, his signature block described "Eric Pope" as an "Attorney at Law, HC, PLLC Legal Principle [sic]" at "Pope & Dunn Law, PLLC," provided a link to the Pope and Dunn website, and listed the Manhattan Address and 917 Number-2.
- c. In or about October 2017, LAMBERT purported to provide legal advice and services to Printing Company-1 regarding its dispute with its former employee. At some point, Printing Company-1 became unable to contact LAMBERT, who stopped responding to emails and calls.
- d. After JOHN LAMBERT, a/k/a "Eric Pope," the defendant, failed to resolve the dispute and ceased communicating with Printing Company-1, the former employee filed a lawsuit against Printing Company-1.

30. Based on my review of the documents provided by Printing Company-1, my interview of Printing Company-1 Employee, and records from PayPal, I have learned that Printing Company-1 paid JOHN LAMBERT, a/k/a "Eric Pope," the defendant, approximately \$2,250 for his purported legal advice and services. The PayPal account to which Skincare Company-1

Founder made those payments was in the name of Headline Consulting.

31. Based on my review of records from PayPal, I have learned that, from at least in or about November 2016 through at least in or about May 2018, the Headline Consulting PayPal account to which the payments described in this Complaint were sent received over \$50,000 in payments.

WHEREFORE, deponent respectfully requests that JOHN LAMBERT, a/k/a "Eric Pope," the defendant, be imprisoned or bailed, as the case may be.


Special Agent Kevin LeClair
United States Attorney's Office
Southern District of New York

Sworn to before me this
11 day of April, 2019


THE HONORABLE SARAH NETBURN
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK